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SUBJECT: SAMBI DEMANDS UNION FORCES ACCESS IN ANJOUAN

REF: ANTANANARIVO 1435

¶1. (U) Comoran President Sambu held a rally in Mutsumudu, Anjouan, on December 25 telling supporters he would not leave until Island President Bacar authorized Union forces access at the sea port and airport. Sambu called on Anjouan Island forces to turn in their weapons to Union counterparts and insisted that Bacar's obstinacy would cost him the upcoming election. Following the failure of talks to delineate security responsibilities for Union and Island forces, Sambu and Bacar have taken their mutual recriminations to the Comoran public and international community (reftel). Island President Bacar insists on an international force in Anjouan for the upcoming election, arguing there would be "trouble" if Union and Island forces were mixed.

¶2. (SBU) Police contacts reported that Bacar originally refused to allow Sambu's plane to land in Anjouan, but later gave in. An Embassy NGO contact in Anjouan said President Sambu had also chartered a vessel to bring Union reinforcements from Grand Comore to Anjouan. A tense calm prevails as rumors circulate the island nation about impending "crisis."

¶3. (SBU) Abdallah Massoundi, First Counselor at the Comoran Embassy in Antananarivo, told PolEcon Chief December 26 that Union President Sambu and Anjouan Island President Bacar were currently in negotiations to end the stand-off. Initially reluctant to meet personally with Sambu, Bacar relented to discuss potential solutions. EmbOffs have yet to reach Union or Island officials present at these negotiations.

¶4. (SBU) COMMENT: Sambu won easily in Anjouan during the April primary and May national election; the December 25 rally served as a reminder to Bacar that the Union President is far more popular than he is. While powerful and effectively in control of his turf in Anjouan, Bacar has little to his credit in terms of government services or economic development. His frequent refrain that all of Anjouan's woes are the fault of the Union government in Moroni carries less and less weight with the Anjouanese. This is particularly true when they see the charismatic President Sambu in person, speaking eloquently about unity, Islamic values, and development. END COMMENT.

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